



# United States Department of the Interior

GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
Reston, Virginia 22092

AUG 19 1975

Mr. Ole J. Nordland  
Coachella Valley County Water District  
Post Office Box 1058  
Coachella, California 92236

Dear Mr. Nordland:

Please pardon the delay in answering your letter of July 10 concerning the earliest use of the name Coachella Valley on maps published by the Geological Survey. It was necessary to recover documents from the Federal Archives and the Board on Geographic Names in order to give a complete answer.

The earliest Topographic map in the area was the San Jacinto 1:125,000-scale map surveyed in 1897-98 and published in 1901. That map showed the name Conchilla Desert for the northwestern part of the basin. The name form "Conchilla" was used by scientists at that time as reported in California Place Names (Erwin G. Gudde, 1969). The map was reprinted in 1905 and the same spelling appeared.

The adjoining Indio 1:125,000-scale Topographic map, surveyed in 1901 and published in 1904, showed Conchilla Desert for the northwestern portion of the basin and Conchilla Valley for the northcentral portion. However, the stop on the Southern Pacific Railroad was labeled Coachella. The names were apparently a conglomeration of scientific and local usage as evidenced by the following quotation taken from a December 17, 1908 letter to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names from W. C. Mendenhall, USGS Geologist in charge of Ground Water Investigations.

".....This northwestern end of the desert seems to have been called the Conchilla Valley, or Conchilla Desert on maps made before the settlement of the region.....Settlement of the valley began four or five years ago. One of the Stations of the Southern Pacific Railway was called Coachella. I do not know the origin of this term, but it is possible that it is a corruption of Conchilla. Whether or not that be true, the term Coachella, applied first to the station, and afterward to the entire valley about it, has become fixed in local usage, and can not now be displaced. It appears universally in current news literature, and should be recognized upon our maps....."

An accompanying letter dated December 19, 1908 from Henry Gannett, once Geographer in charge of Topographic Surveys, expresses lack of agreement within the Geological Survey in the following quotation:

"....I find upon the San Jacinto special sheet of the Geological Survey, and also upon other maps, the name of "Conchilla" valley and desert, and I am strongly of the opinion that "Conchilla," which he says means small shells, is a proper name, and that the name as he finds it applied to a railroad station originated in a typographical error. ...."

The spelling Coachella was approved by the Board on Geographic Names on January 6, 1909 after the name form was found to be in the current Rand and McNally Atlas and U.S. Postal Guide. The Board's decision was reflected on the next reprinting of the San Jacinto (1909) and Indio (1910) Topographic maps. Mr. Mendenhall's publication (WSP No. 225) in 1909 also conforms to the decision for Coachella. The statement to the contrary in California Place Names is in error.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this interesting geographic name problem.

Sincerely yours,

*Doyle G. Frederick*

For R. H. Lyddan  
Chief, Topographic Division

cc:  
Topo. Files  
RT (2)  
RT-C  
GNS (2)  
Chief-WMC  
MNU ✓

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